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FROM BEAN TO BAR

BRINGING A TASTE OF CHOCOLATE CULTURE TO NORTHWEST ARKANSAS

Targeting responsible consumers, many craft food purveyors pride themselves on offering a product that's local, small-batch or ethically produced and sourced. Making Northwest Arkansas unique, our area hosts several of these talented suppliers. From homemade jams to craft beer and fair trade coffee, area companies offer a little something to suit everyone's tastes.

Joining this craft scene with their bean-to-bar chocolate are two notable chocolate makers, Hello Cocoa and Kyya Chocolate. Both influenced by missionary work abroad, each business took prior work and school experience and a passion for ethical business practices and used these skills to produce delectable and sustainable treats.

With a common desire to benefit the lives of their suppliers and the countries they call home, both companies closely work with farmers and distributors to ethically source their beans from exotic locations around the world, thus enabling them to share a bit of unique culture within our own communities.



Preston Stewart,
Hello Cocoa
co-owner and chief
chocolate maker

HELLO COCOA

Sharing a passion for food and international travel, the origins of Hello Cocoa are rooted in the owners' longtime friendships and mutual enthusiasm for adventure and meeting new people. Wanting to pair that enthusiasm for food and culture with a hunger for sustainable business practices, in 2014 Hello Cocoa was born.

"We thought Hello Cocoa was a great signifier of discovering chocolate, cultures and friends across the world," says Lauren Blanco, one of Hello Cocoa's six owners. "Our goal as we grow is to find innovative and creative ways to cultivate such a community around a simple yet delicious product. In striving to offer this 'adventure in chocolate,' we seek a result that emphasizes community, gathering, sharing and togetherness that's derived from a variety of sophisticated and adventurous experiences, all melted into a tasty treat, beginning with a simple greeting, 'hello.'"

All of Hello Cocoa's products are crafted in the company's Fayetteville factory with sustainably sourced beans from Uganda, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. Producing three signature dark chocolate bars as its staples, each bar, made with just three ingredients, is designed to highlight the natural flavors of the beans.

"By highlighting the flavor of the cacao bean, we give the consumer a small yet enjoyable culinary window into the landscape and flavor of another place," says Blanco. "We have been privileged to visit cacao farms and learn about the origin of chocolate, and we knew we wanted to share a little taste of that chocolate adventure within our own communities."

The company's Uganda bar offers a classic chocolate taste with distinct notes of coffee and honey; the Venezuela yields bright and delicate flavors of citrus and red fruit; and the Dominican, the newest bar, is the fruitiest, with hints of dark fruit and chicory. Using these three bars as a base, Hello Cocoa also produces seasonal products as well as local collaborations such as Mocha Bar, a buzzing coffee chocolate bar made with black apple espresso beans from Mama Carmen's Espresso Café in Fayetteville.

Hello Cocoa's factory is often open to the public for tours, as well as chocolate tasting events such as its second annual "Chocolate and Bubbly Tour," taking place on Feb. 13.



KYYA CHOCOLATE

Also sourcing beans from Africa, it was a trip to Uganda that inspired Rick Boosey, co-owner of Kyya Chocolate, to start a sustainable business. Overwhelmed by the poverty he saw in Ugandan slums, it was on his 30-hour flight home that Boosey decided he must do more. Researching the top exports for Uganda — coffee, cotton and chocolate — he decided the chocolate industry was where his expertise fit best. Shortly after arriving home, he purchased some cocoa nibs, a tabletop conch and a tempering machine, and there in his laundry room, Kyya Chocolate began. Now, three years later, Kyya is producing roughly 10,000 bars of chocolate each month in its Elm Springs factory.

Seeking to source lesser-known chocolates, Boosey acquires his beans from 14 exotic countries from around the world. “Kyya celebrates the diversity of chocolate,” says Boosey. “There are 60-plus distinct flavors in cocoa beans. Our approach to single-origin chocolate is to celebrate that.”

Boosey’s desire for creativity and innovation is certainly highlighted in his chocolate flavors. Kyya stocks 25 different chocolates from a combination of 14 origins, six richness offerings and 13 infusions. A few Kyya and customer favorites include the Dark Chocolate Ugandan, a classic dark chocolate bar infused with cacao nibs; the Madagascar Midnight Dark, featuring hints of apricots, raisins, dark cherries and red wine; the coffee infusion, a dark chocolate bar mixed with coffee grounds; and its newest, the Sassafras Winery bar, a Sassafras wine and nib infused Midnight Dark chocolate bar that will be revealed at a party at Sassafras Springs Winery, located in Springdale, later this month.

Helping to keep Kyya’s flavors innovative and to share Boosey’s craft with the public, Kyya hosts monthly factory tours as well as a weekly summer camp offering kids ages 6 through 16 an opportunity to make their own chocolate. Each week at camp the kids create a new chocolate flavor Kyya has never done before, thus teaching Boosey himself a new thing or two about making chocolate. “(It) taught us tons about chocolate, flavors, productions and deadlines,” says Boosey about the exercise. “We taught over 150 people last summer and picked up more fans from that experience than anything else we have ever done.” ■



Rick Boosey, owner of Kyya Chocolate, took this photo on his first sourcing trip to Guatemala

Hello Cocoa and Kyya Chocolate products can be purchased at their factories, at local retailers such as Natural Grocers, Onyx Coffee Lab, Ozark Natural Foods, as well as many others, and online. To learn more about each company or to see where all their products are sold, please visit their websites, www.hellococoachocolate.com and www.kyyachocolate.com.